THE RUNWAY INCURSION PROBLEM

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A runway incursion is any occurrence at an airport involving an aircraft, vehicle, person, or object on the ground that creates a collision hazard or results in a loss of separation, as defined by air traffic requirements. This separation loss can happen to a departing aircraft, or one preparing for a takeoff. Planes that are landing or intending to land can become subject to a loss of separation or incursion. In other words, ground operations are fertile ground for incursions.

Although general aviation accidents have been decreasing over the past few years, incursions with all dangers attached to them have been increasing at an alarming rate. It is merely a matter of time for these incursions become tragic accidents.

Some Runway Accidents at Airports with Control Towers.

Although the definition applies only to airports with operating control towers, real danger exists for ground operations at any airport. The danger is greatest at night and in reduced visibility conditions. A lot like a busy intersection in your neighborhood, as traffic at our airports increases, our exposure also increases. Basic communication technique and an understanding of the airport environment become your safety net.

November 1996: A Beech 1900C was making a straight-in approach at dusk in visual conditions to Runway 13 at Quincy Municipal Airport, an uncontrolled field. At the same time, a Beech King Air began its takeoff roll on Runway 04. Runway 04 intersects Runway 13. Waiting behind the King Air was a Piper Cherokee (PA-28.)

At 1700, the captain of the Beech 1900C reported his airplane was on short final for Runway 13. He asked "is the aircraft gonna hold in position on Runway 04 or

are you guys gonna take off"?

The King Air passenger-pilot did not respond, but the pilot of the Cherokee did, stating "Seven six four …holding…for departure on runway four." The NTSB report found the Cherokee pilot's response to the Beech 1900C's question inappropriate since the Cherokee was behind the King Air and not first in line for takeoff. The Beech 1900C cockpit voice recorder picked up a ground proximity warning signal followed by the last part of the Piper Cherokee's transmission, "* on the King Air."

Despite evasive action by the pilots of both planes, they collided on the ground at the intersection of the two runways. The accident killed ten passengers and two crewmembers on the Beech 1900C. Two people in the King Air were also killed.

The weather was not a factor and all the pilots involved were properly certificated, trained and qualified.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determined the probable cause of the accident to be the failure of the King Air pilots to effectively monitor the common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF.) Also implicated was their failure to scan for traffic. Contributing to the cause of the accident was the Cherokee pilot's interrupted radio transmission. The pilots of the Beech 1900C misunderstood his message.

In its discussion of the human factors involved in the accident, the NTSB concluded that the transmission by the Cherokee pilot created some of the confusion that precipitated the accident. Also, the pilot of the King Air was a retired airline captain and known to usually be in a hurry to get home. It is possible the pilots in the King Air were not monitoring the common traffic advisory frequency.

This tragic accident illustrates the necessity of stressing basic communication technique and a solid understanding of the airport environment.

Knowledge, training and awareness become your safety net.